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The National Security Working Group (NSWG) provides wide-spectrum coverage of issues like the Iranian threat, missile defense, sequestration, New START, events in Syria and more. We look forward to providing this newsletter to RSC members and welcome your input throughout the 113th Congress.

Syria's Strategic Importance: More Than Chemical Weapons (Rep. Franks)

One of the recent hot topics vis-à-vis Syria has been whether the Assad regime or rebel forces employed chemical weapons against each other. The media, political pundits and White House staffers have all pounced on this question, and offered speculation about the ideal moral and strategic U.S. response.

But, as Israel's purported air strike this weekend reveals, the strategic importance of Syria goes far beyond the moral quandary of whether chemical weapons usage deserves a U.S. response. Though Israel has not confirmed or denied involvement in these recent strikes, Israeli officials have said the ultimate aim is to prevent Syria's advanced weaponry from being transferred to Lebanon and into the armories of Hezbollah.

What is taking place within the Syrian borders is much more than just a civil war, and the ensuing unrest cannot be underestimated. Tehran certainly isn't ignoring the issue; Iran uses Syria as the main conduit to the Shiite militia Hezbollah in Lebanon, the proxy through which Iran can threaten Israel with an arsenal of short-range missiles.

In an effort to defend against retaliatory attacks from Syria, Israel has moved two Iron Dome batteries to its Northern Border. No less than four years ago, the top U.S. diplomat in Damascus disclosed that Syria had begun delivery of ballistic missiles to Hezbollah, and yet the most recent National Security Strategy, only includes Syria in a single reference. Meanwhile Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq each got at least a dozen mentions based on their particular brand of security issues.

The most forgiving description I can provide about this administration's response to the Syrian situation is vacillation and foot dragging. Mr. Obama has been



Yesterday Secretary Kerry and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov announced a U.S.-Russian agreement to hold an international conference to find a political solution to the conflict in Syria.

irresponsible and short sighted with his strategic decisions in the region - drawing red lines and creating off-the-cuff policy that our enemies now know we may never enforce.

Unfortunately, this is not this first instance of a clear lack of leadership on important matters of national security. We cannot ignore Iran's attempt to fuel this proxy war in their effort to avoid Hezbollah's worst-case-scenario: a Sunni-dominated Syria on one side and Israel on the other. Let us take the lead on reinforcing Syria's strategic importance, and call upon this administration to develop a sound and coherent policy for this increasingly unstable region.

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Time to Arm the Syrian Opposition (Rep. Tim Cotton)

The time has come for the U.S. to provide lethal assistance, including training and intelligence support, to thoroughly vetted, reform-minded, pro-Western opposition forces, as well as more humanitarian aid. Groups like the Al-Nusra Front, an al-Qaeda

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affiliate, are in Syria providing this assistance to co-opt the movement to remove Assad from power. This growing influence of radical Islamists—some of whom are fueled by Iranian money and weapons—puts at risk the possibility of a peaceful, democratic transition in Syria. The U.S. will soon have a larger crisis on its hands if we do not act quickly, as our allies throughout the region are beginning to do.

The Syrian civil war increasingly threatens America's vital national security interests. Al-Qaeda is gaining strength among the opposition, creating new jihadists and potentially getting access to chemical weapons. Jordan is destabilized by a near 50 percent increase in its population by refugees. Israel has had to strike Syrian assets multiple times. And over 70,000 civilians have been slaughtered. Each day the Assad regime remains nominally in power, the plight of the civilian population of Syria is prolonged, and, perhaps more concerning, the region edges closer to widespread destabilization.

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More Details Surface in Benghazi Hearings (Rep. John Fleming)

This week, the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee held a hearing on last year's Benghazi terrorist attack featuring three State Department "whistleblowers". Perhaps the most troubling aspect of this tragedy is the lack of security forces at the Benghazi compound, despite hundreds of reports and assessments published by the Intelligence Community about the threats to American interests, facilities, and personnel prior to the September 11 attacks. An interim joint committee report by five House Committees stated that throughout 2012, there were more than 20 attacks against Western and international interests in Benghazi alone. Testimony from Gregory Hicks, the deputy chief of mission at the U.S. Consulate in Libya and in Tripoli during the attacks, indicated that even although a team of Special Forces was able to travel to Benghazi once the attack began, the team was prevented from doing so by U.S. AFRICOM. Just two hours after the attack began the State Department Operations Center issued an alert that Ansar al-Sharia, an al-Qa'ida-affiliated group was responsible, but the story the public heard from the Administration was that the event was a "spontaneous response" by otherwise peaceful protestors to a video on YouTube ridiculing the prophet Muhammad. Unfortunately, these were not just talking points for Sunday news shows, but included serious policy decisions with the Administration reportedly requesting YouTube to remove the video from its site and former State Department Secretary Clinton appearing in an advertisement aired in Pakistan condemning the video.

The failure of the Administration to respond more aggressively to the attacks has contributed to a perception of U.S. withdrawal. Stressing the reprehensibility of the Muhammad video over the egregiousness of the Libya attacks, the President Obama has effectively apologized for American values of religious freedom and freedom of speech. Let's be clear: the video did not spark the violence in the Middle East. Complacency in pursuing al-Qaeda, policies that embolden purveyors of terror and radical ideology, and an apologetic tone that projects a weakened America is a much more credible source of the violent anti-Americanism that is taking root in the Middle East and North Africa.



Many Americans are demanding answers from Benghazi investigations.

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Each NSWG Item reflects the position and view of the authoring office. Questions or comments regarding the NSWG can be directed to: Joe Murray, Joe.Murray@mail.house.gov or 6-0678